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Transcript of letter, May 20, 1850, from Armistead Burt to Thomas Green Clemson

Armistead Burt

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Washington City

20 May, 1850.

Mr dear Sir:

Information from the United States will have informed you that Mr. Calhoun's death occurred before your letter could have reached me. I did not receive it until the fortnight after this sad event. I have been very much indisposed ever since, and too much overcome by it to trust myself with an attempt to write you about the illness and last moments of one whose loss is so heavy a bereavement to his whole country and such an affliction to his friends and relatives.

On our way to this city, before the meeting of Congress, we met Mr. Calhoun in Charleston, as I thought, in his usual health. I thought it quite as good as I could have expected, and better than when I last saw him. His complexion was good, and he seemed to have his customary strength. We came together, and he appeared to have borne the fatigue of the travel well. We were at the Hotel together, and talked of our arrangements for the winter. I submitted that matter to him, and Martha.

Mr. C. finally determined to go on Capitol Hill, and took lodgings at Niles' boarding house. He believed it would be best for him, as it would save the ascent from the avenue to the Capitol, which he believed had injured him last winter. I earnestly advised against it, but without avail. Martha was so much opposed to going on the Hill, that we remained on the

Avenue all winter. For the first time, we were thus unfortunately separated. His health remained quite good, until he took a cold, which affected him very much. Of this he became much relieved but was quite feeble, when he determined to attend the sittings of the Senate. I observed he coughed more than usual, and his expectorations were more frequent and copious, than formerly. A visit to the Senate when he was quite too feeble to leave his lodgings, and the excitement of debate, threw him back and produced slight fever. I did not regard it as serious, and did not doubt he would recover. He thought, he would soon recover, and I had always found him so calm and accurate an observer of his situation, that my opinion was, in a degree, influenced by his own. Dr. Hall, his Physician, believed he would recover, but advised that he should leave Washington, as soon as he had strength enough to travel. He was opposed to it, but finally yielded to my entreaties, and consented to go to Mr. Cralle's his old friend, at Lynchburg, in Virginia. He sent one of his trunks. I saw he did not improve as fast as I expected, and consulted him about the propriety of writing for Mrs. Calhoun. He insisted he was gaining every day, slowly, and strenuously opposed my writing. About two weeks before his death I determined to write to Mrs. C. without letting him know it, and did so, asking her to come without delay. But even then I had no fear of his death. But I observed him closely, seeing him from twice to three times in the day and night, and could not see that he was gaining strength, as he thought he was. Three days before his death, I was violently attacked with fever, and saw him no more. Dr. Hall reported to me that he was slowly improving, and I neither knew nor heard, to the

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Thomas G. Clemson.....Page 3.....20 May, 1850.

contrary, until half hour before he expired. Martha had gone home on a hasty visit and was absent also. Everything that skill or kindness could effect was done. I had procured an excellent and faithful female nurse. Indeed nothing was omitted. His death came upon him unexpected, and from all I heard, he was not aware of its approach until about an hour before he ceased to live. But he died, as quietly as an infant sleeps. The sensation which his death produced, can never be imagined, in Congress and throughout the country. No American, whatever was his station, had higher honor paid to his memory. The whole nation not only mourned, but wept his loss. I send a few of the many tributes to his virtues and his character which were called forth. I have thought Mrs. Clemson and yourself would value them. I can hardly realise that he is no more. Martha's health has been seriously affected by her grief. Martha sends her love to yourself, Mrs. Clemson, and the children, with mine. Martha begs that I shall add a word more to Mrs. Clemson. She says she did not forget the minatures of Mr. Calhoun which Mrs. C. asked her to have painted this winter. But that Mr. Calhoun said he could not have it done well here, and that Mrs. Clemson must have it painted from the one she has in Brussels. She hopes Mrs. C. will believe that the minatures were not neglected by her, and that Mrs. C. will not be disappointed on account of it.

Sincerely and truly

yours

Armistead Burt.

Thomas G. Clemson, Esq.